

**Chairman Tom Davis**  
**Opening Statement**

Government Reform Committee Hearing on “The Capital Region’s Critical Link:  
Ensuring Metrorail’s Future As a Safe, Reliable and Affordable Transportation Option”  
February 18, 2005

The Washington Metro system has become a vital part of everyday life in the nation’s capital, providing an indispensable commuting option for hundreds of thousands of the area’s workers and out-of-town visitors each day. A significant segment of the federal workforce also relies on the system, making it an integral component of the government’s ability to function. It is also the primary means of transportation for those attending events of national significance, such as presidential inaugurations, the annual Fourth of July celebration, and the Cherry Blossom Festival. Metro, in short, possesses a national significance.

Metro was constructed to be a world-class system. As WMATA CEO Dick White will note in his testimony today, Metro boasts tile and granite platforms and vaulted ceilings. Its cars have a modern look to them, and contain more seats for passengers than do cars on many other transit systems. It is a system befitting the capital of the free world, and one in which we should all take pride.

Past administrations and Congresses have recognized the national significance of Metro, and the federal government has long played an appropriate, significant role in the system’s evolution. I have asked the Government Accountability Office to prepare a report detailing the role the federal government has played; that report is available here today. The National Capital Transportation Act of 1969 and subsequent amendments in 1979 and 1990 originated in the House Committee on the District of Columbia, since incorporated into this Committee. This remains the committee of jurisdiction over Metro. As Metro begins to show the inevitable effects of age and ever-increasing demand, it is incumbent upon this committee to once again play a leading role.

In recent years, Metro’s management has issued dire warnings that the system is in need of significant re-investment. Metro’s ridership has grown by twenty percent in the past five years, and is expected to double by 2025. As any Orange Line passenger will tell you, additional rail cars are already urgently needed to meet peak hour demand. In addition to new rail cars and buses, Metro has requested significant dollars to maintain its existing infrastructure and make necessary expansions to reflect the growing Metropolitan D.C. area.

In 2002, Metro published a \$12.2 billion dollar, 10-year Capital Improvement Plan. This plan includes all of the necessary maintenance, increased capacity, and service expansions Metro believes necessary for the original 103-mile system. Recognizing the fiscal constraints and political realities of the federal, state, and local governments that fund the system, Metro’s management subsequently developed a package of “bare

bones,” must-have items that reflect the most urgent needs. This package, called the “Metro Matters” program, consists of \$3.3 billion for new rail cars and buses needed to relieve unmanageable congestion for another ten years. It also contains other measures intended to keep up with demand and maintain an acceptable level of service.

In my opinion, “Metro Matters” is not a pie-in-the-sky, Cadillac of a plan. It’s more like a Yugo: a lean, mean proposal to keep the system moving, accommodate ridership growth, and allow the federal government to operate effectively. It’s a program that recognizes that Metro is unique – that Metro is a key partner to the federal government, and a vital national security asset. When Metro shuts down, the government shuts down.

Adding to these capital needs are the aggravating factors of increased post-9/11 security requirements and the growing MetroAccess paratransit program. Both represent significant obligations on Metro’s budget. The recent report of the Metro Funding Panel described MetroAccess as a social service rather than a transit issue and did not take costs associated with the program into account when making its projections and recommendations. Call it what you will; it is a serious matter. In his testimony, Mr. White calls for a similar blue-ribbon panel to consider MetroAccess; I echo that call.

Metro has sought to make the case for significant additional investment at the federal, state, and local levels. We hope to examine, if not validate, their requests today. That said, one cannot credibly make these requests without also taking a close look at Metro’s management and operational performance.

Metro has suffered a series of embarrassments and problems in recent years. For example, Metro’s unveiling of the Metro Matters campaign coincided with revelations that millions of dollars in parking revenues had gone missing. Last November saw an actual train wreck at the Woodley Park station, causing 20 casualties and disrupting service on the red line. Metro’s implementation of its SmartTrip card program has been fraught with difficulties, causing frustration for its customers, including my wife – and therefore, me.

We’ve done and will continue doing the management oversight we’re responsible for – but that will not distract us from addressing our larger duty: ensuring a renewed federal government commitment to the Metro system.

After all, even with these high-profile incidents, Metro has been described as one of the better-managed transit systems in the country. Metro recovers 57 percent of its costs through fare box and other revenue, one of the highest cost recovery ratios in the country. But does this figure truly point to an efficiently run system? From our witnesses today we will attempt to derive objective measures to determine where Metro stands. We will also hear from Mr. White and Mr. Kauffman regarding steps they are taking to tighten Metro’s ship and improve performance.

There is a great deal at stake in maintaining the investment we have made in Metro. More than just keeping the proverbial trains running on time, Metro does serve a vital role in the day-to-day operations of the federal government. If there are looming problems, we need to address them before a crisis sets in. Today's hearing marks the starting point in that endeavor.

I would like to now welcome today's witnesses.